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Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

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Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women
Sixty-sixth session

Summary record of the 1488th meeting
Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Friday, 24 February 2017, at 10 a.m.

Chair: Ms. Leinarte

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The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.

Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 18 of the Convention (*continued*)

Combined initial to third periodic reports of the Federated States of Micronesia (CEDAW/C/FSM/1-3; CEDAW/C/FSM/Q/1-3 and Add.1)

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of the Federated States of Micronesia took places at the Committee table.*

2. **Ms. Walter** (Federated States of Micronesia), introducing the combined initial to third periodic reports of the Federated States of Micronesia (CEDAW/C/FSM/1-3), said that the Federated States of Micronesia was a small nation of around 100,000 people spread across 607 islands scattered over approximately 1 million square miles of ocean. There were four main island groups forming the four states of the federation. Given such a geographical configuration, efforts to reach out to the population for the purposes of consultation and public education were fraught with tremendous obstacles and challenges. Both commercial air travel and sea transportation were limited and expensive, isolating many of the islands. Although the Government was investing in shipping services, the operating and maintenance costs of such services were high. Thus, the nation's geographic configuration was an important backdrop against which its compliance with its obligations under the Convention should be assessed.

3. The country's traditional communities played an important role in rearing children, protecting all members of society and fostering a spirit of cooperation and respect among the population. The Constitution affirmed the common wish of the people to live together in peace and harmony, preserve the heritage of the past and protect the promise of the future, and also stipulated that the traditions of the people could be protected by statute. The Constitution protected the rights to due process and free speech, prohibited discrimination and provided for women's equal protection under the law.

4. A 2014 family health and safety study had found that approximately one third of the country's women had experienced some form of physical and/or sexual violence in their lifetime, and nearly one fourth had experienced such violence at the hands of a partner in the preceding 12 months. The State of Kosrae had sought to address gender violence by adopting a Family Protection Act. With assistance from its donor and technical partners, the national Government had organized awareness-raising activities on gender-based violence and was encouraging the other three states to adopt similar laws.

5. Although, according to the 2010 census, females lagged behind males at all levels of educational attainment, the Government continued to narrow that gap through efforts to create better outcomes for female students. That process would take time, as certain cultural practices and traditions posed complex challenges to the implementation of the State party's obligations under the Convention. At the same time, more women were earning advanced degrees and becoming involved in decision-making at various levels of government and in the private sector. There were now six female judges and a significant number of female cabinet members at both the national and state levels, in sharp contrast to the situation a decade previously, when there had been no women in those posts. The national gender policy, which was in the process of final review, focused on increasing the representation of women in decision-making positions, eliminating gender-based violence, improving access to education and employment, addressing barriers facing women in the workplace and mainstreaming gender. For the last eight years, the Government had funded biennial conferences on women, at which a variety of gender issues were discussed.

6. Other developments included the introduction of a congressional resolution to remove all of the State party's reservations to the Convention; the adoption of a law on maternity leave; the adoption of a law raising the age of sexual consent from 13 to 18 years in the State of Chuuk; the enactment of strict measures to combat human trafficking; and the ratification in 2016 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

7. The issue of climate change, which had major implications for the Federated States of Micronesia and its people, had been integrated into the Government's national strategic

planning. Under a 2013 law, government departments were mandated to formulate plans and policies to implement the Nationwide Integrated Disaster Risk Management and Climate Change Policy and to provide feedback on their results to Congress and the President. Given that women were important stakeholders in that strategy, the Government was taking steps to encourage greater involvement on their part in climate and disaster risk management.

Articles 1 to 6

8. **Ms. Patten** said that she wished to commend the State party for its progress in implementing the Convention, despite all the challenges it faced. One such challenge was the federal structure of the Government and the fact that legislative power was divided between the national Congress and the four state legislatures. In that regard, she drew attention to the Committee's general recommendation No. 28 on core obligations of States parties under article 2 of the Convention, in particular paragraph 39 on accountability, which stated that, in all circumstances, States parties to the Convention remained responsible for ensuring full implementation throughout the territories under their jurisdiction. She asked whether a coordination and monitoring mechanism had been set up to ensure observance of the Convention in respect of all women within the State party's jurisdiction without discrimination; whether the four states had the necessary resources to effectively implement the State party's obligations under the Convention; and what types of technical assistance the Government received from its various development partners.

9. She was gratified to learn of efforts to withdraw the State party's reservations to the Convention, two of which — to articles 2 (f) and 16 — were incompatible with the latter's object and purpose. She would appreciate further information on the status of those efforts, including whether a full withdrawal was envisaged and, if so, the estimated time frame for its completion. Given that neither the national Constitution nor any of the state constitutions contained a comprehensive definition of discrimination that was in line with article 1 of the Convention, she asked how that situation would be rectified; what kind of majority was required to amend the Constitution; and whether there was a stand-alone anti-discrimination or gender equality law in all four states that contained such a definition.

10. She wished to know what steps were being taken to coordinate the repeal of discriminatory legislation and to harmonize laws across all states in order to incorporate the Convention into domestic law; what measures had been taken to raise awareness of the Convention among state officials; and what measures had been taken to increase synergies between the different levels of government and provide the national Government with an overview of efforts by the states to implement the Convention, particularly with regard to the repeal of discriminatory laws. She requested clarification of the relationship between customary and statutory law in the event of a conflict between the two. She would be grateful for information on the number of cases in which such a conflict had arisen in the context of women's rights and gender equality; how the law had been applied; whether customary law had been used to override the formal protection of women's rights; and whether judicial personnel in all four states were receiving ongoing training on the Convention.

11. **Ms. Walter** (Federated States of Micronesia) said that the national Constitution had supremacy over state constitutions. A gender policy task force coordinated gender policy among the national and state governments and was currently disseminating information on the findings of the 2014 family health and safety study to all four states. The Speaker of the national Congress had introduced a resolution at the 2016 congressional session to withdraw all of the State's reservations to the Convention, but no follow-up action had been taken.

12. The country received technical assistance for policy development in the areas of gender equality and the rights of persons with disabilities. Discrimination was prohibited at both the national and state levels, with special emphasis on protecting the rights of women. Despite the importance accorded to culture in the Federated States of Micronesia, customary law did not take precedence over statutory law with regard to discrimination.

13. **Ms. Patten** said that, given the State party's complex constitutional structure and geographic configuration, it should consider adopting a four-year national action plan on the implementation of the Committee's concluding observations in order to coordinate implementation efforts among the four states. She wished to know whether the State party planned to ratify the remaining core United Nations human rights treaties, especially the two International Covenants of 1966 relating respectively to civil and political rights and to economic, social and cultural rights. She requested additional information on women's access to justice, in particular on the location of the nation's courts of law and the use of mobile courts to facilitate access for women on remote islands. She drew attention to the Committee's general recommendation No. 33 on women's access to justice and asked whether the Government had developed a policy on public legal aid.

14. **Ms. Schulz** asked whether, in view of the many obstacles to women's access to justice, such as poverty and women's insufficient knowledge of their rights, there were plans to change the rule according to which free government-funded legal assistance from the Micronesian Legal Services Corporation was available to only one of the spouses in cases involving civil and domestic disputes. In addition, she wished to know whether the statement in paragraph 12 of the State party's replies to the list of issues (CEDAW/C/FSM/Q/1-3/Add.1) meant that certain articles of the Convention could not be directly invoked in court.

15. **Ms. Manalo** asked whether the provisions of the Convention had been given constitutional status through incorporation into the national Constitution, or whether they had the status of national statutory law and could be invoked only if they had been codified in implementing legislation.

16. **Ms. Jahan** said that she would appreciate updated information on the status of the law reform measures currently under way, including the "no-drop policy" whereby cases that were brought to court were pursued even after the customary pardon was given to the perpetrator. Although the State party was to be commended for having translated the Convention into all of its official languages, awareness of the Convention did not seem to have trickled down to the grass-roots level, and she asked what measures had been or were being taken to raise the profile of the Convention.

17. **Ms. Acar** said that, according to the Committee's general recommendation No. 19 on violence against women and its subsequent jurisprudence, as well as that of other international human rights experts, violence against women was a particularly abhorrent form of discrimination that kept women from enjoying their human rights. How did the Government explain the fact that the prohibition of discrimination was enshrined in the Constitution, yet there was no law on violence against women in the State party's national legislation?

18. **Mr. Bacalando** (Federated States of Micronesia) said that the national Constitution stipulated that any act of government that was in conflict with the Constitution was invalid to the extent of the conflict, which implied that states could not take any action that contravened the Constitution. The process of amending the Constitution required the consent of at least three of the four states, as well as a three-fourths majority of the votes cast on the amendment. Like most national constitutions, the Constitution of the Federated States of Micronesia was a statement of principles, which were subsequently refined in statutes, regulations and public laws. Customary practices could not prevail over civil law principles or contradict constitutional principles. The Supreme Court had determined that, while customary practices could not override criminal statutes, they could be taken into consideration for the purposes of sentencing. The delegation would provide the Committee with more complete written information on that issue in due course.

19. The Federated States of Micronesia had national, state and municipal courts. Litigants could obtain legal assistance from organizations such as the Micronesian Legal Services Corporation. If one spouse availed himself or herself of those services, the other spouse had to seek the services of a private or pro bono attorney. On the other hand, the Public Defender's Office provided assistance to defendants in criminal proceedings before the national or state courts, and a proposal had been made to expand its services to include civil litigation as well.

20. The statement in paragraph 12 of the State party's replies to the list of issues did not deny that the Convention was applicable in the Federated States of Micronesia. The rationale behind it was that, under the country's legal system, ratified treaties were not automatically transposed into national law; instead, the national law had to be brought progressively into line with the treaty. In cases where the national Congress had not yet adopted a law to implement a given treaty provision, that provision could not be directly invoked in court.

21. The fact that violence against women was a form of discrimination was, in effect, addressed by the constitutional provision that prohibited discrimination against any person, as part of the civil rights protection granted to all persons. The details of that provision were laid out in statutes and regulations at the national and state levels, and a comprehensive national law on civil rights protection prescribed criminal penalties for violations. He could not provide an estimate of the time frame for congressional approval of the resolution to withdraw reservations to the Convention, but such approval required the support of a simple majority of the 14 members of Congress.

22. **Ms. Jahan** said that the relationship between customary law and civil law just described by the delegation seemed to contradict provisions in both the national and state constitutions. She would therefore appreciate a more detailed explanation of that relationship.

23. **Mr. Bacalando** (Federated States of Micronesia) said that criminal law statutes enacted by Congress could not be overridden by cultural practices or traditions that supported the criminal conduct in question. Thus, customary law did not rise to a level that could undermine or contradict a statutory provision of law. However, where customary practice and tradition reinforced a law or regulation, they could be given effect.

24. **Ms. Bethel** said that the relationship between the two forms of law was still unclear. Perhaps the delegation could provide an example of a case in which customary law stood alone as the authoritative source of law, and an example of a case in which customary law was specifically overridden by civil law but was taken into account in the determination of the penalty.

25. **Ms. Acar** asked whether, in cases where the two sources of law were in conflict, a more lenient penalty was imposed for criminal acts that were endorsed by culture, custom or tradition.

26. **Ms. Manalo** said that, even though the Federated States of Micronesia had been a party to the Convention for 11 years, progress in implementing the Convention seemed to have been slow. She asked what could be done to increase the State party's political will to implement the Convention in more practical terms, beginning with the removal of all reservations to it, which, in effect, negated its potential benefits to women.

27. **Mr. Bacalando** (Federated States of Micronesia) said that a more lenient penalty did not automatically apply to criminal acts committed in keeping with cultural practices.

28. **Ms. Jahan** asked whether the State party was willing to learn from the experience and best practices of other small island countries in its region, especially with regard to the intersection between tradition, customary attitudes and gender equality. It was disconcerting that the State party did not have a dedicated national institution for the advancement of women, that the existing structure was composed of only one staff member and that only two states had gender machinery. That was an area that needed greater attention. With regard to the bill before Congress on the establishment of a cabinet portfolio for women, she asked whether the State party would be taking any proactive measures to sway public opinion in support of the bill so as to ensure not only its adoption but also the allocation of the necessary resources.

29. **Ms. Nwankwo** said that a bill put forward in 2012 and again in 2014, which would have reserved a small number of congressional seats for women for a period of six years, had failed to receive sufficient support, and no temporary special measures or other steps for advancing women's equality appeared to have been introduced in the State party. Those failures were indicative of public reluctance, a general lack of knowledge of such measures and a lack of widespread efforts to change the situation. Alternative sources had revealed

that the most prevalent barrier to women's participation in politics was the cultural stereotyping of women as not belonging in the political arena and a general tendency, even on the part of women themselves, to believe that leadership was a masculine trait. Cultural, traditional and church leaders were also said to be very influential in controlling the selection of candidates for political office, and they all favoured men. Such beliefs called for large-scale public education and sensitization regarding temporary special measures and the gains to be made by involving women in politics, decision-making and other sectors.

30. As the short duration of the measures proposed under the bill was likely to be insufficient for achieving the estimated critical mass of 40-per-cent representation of women in Congress, she asked whether the State party might consider extending the duration of those temporary special measures to at least 20 years. She wished to know whether the State party had taken any steps to raise awareness about temporary special measures, what kind of quotas were proposed in the bill and whether it prescribed sanctions for political parties that failed to comply with the quotas.

31. **Ms. Oliver** (Federated States of Micronesia) said that learning from the experiences and best practices of other countries was an excellent idea. She would welcome any technical assistance, especially for developing a national plan to follow up on the Committee's concluding observations. There were currently no plans to reintroduce the bill on a regular cabinet portfolio for women, as greater efforts were needed to raise awareness of its importance. The national machinery for gender issues was indeed understaffed and underresourced, as evidenced by the fact that she was the only Gender Development Officer in the Department of Health and Social Affairs; however, she did seek and receive assistance from a number of technical partners. For the next budget cycle, she had made some budget requests for awareness-raising activities, not just in relation to the Convention but also for the other treaties that came under her supervision. Any plans concerning temporary special measures had to be endorsed by the national executive in order to be introduced in Congress.

32. **Ms. Jahan** said that, even if there was not enough political will to reintroduce the bill on a cabinet portfolio for women, there appeared to be much civil society interest in doing so, which was important to bear in mind. Pending the establishment of a stand-alone, independent national institution, she wished to know what measures were being taken to upgrade the current structure through the allocation of human and financial resources under the general budget. She asked whether there were any plans to establish a national human rights institution in the near future and, if so, whether it would have a specific gender component, and whether a time frame had been set for the finalization of the national gender policy.

33. **Ms. Manalo** said that the national machinery for women's advancement, which was key to implementing the Convention, was weak. She asked whether the State party intended to give that machinery greater visibility instead of subsuming it under the Department of Health and Social Affairs. The support of the many non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that were active in the State party could be leveraged to increase the strength, visibility and resources of the national machinery. The State's sincerity about enabling women to enjoy their rights could be proved only by its willingness to implement the Convention.

34. **Ms. Schulz** said that, while she understood that data collection and disaggregation were problematic for small States, they were necessary for informing gender equality policies, which were key to the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals. She asked whether the State party received any support in that regard from the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) or other international agencies.

35. **Ms. Nwankwo** asked what was being done to raise public awareness of the importance of temporary special measures. She also asked whether the Government intended to extend the application of the temporary special measures that were currently in place, and whether any sanctions were imposed on political parties that did not apply those measures.

36. **Ms. Walter** (Federated States of Micronesia) said that although the national machinery for the advancement of women had been introduced some years previously, it still had only one staff member, the Gender Development Officer. Despite the machinery's shortage of financial and human resources, every effort was made to promote the Convention. Several women's NGOs were operational in the country, and women's conferences were held regularly. Data disaggregation by sex was challenging owing to the lack of resources. The Committee's recommendations in that regard would be transmitted to the national statistics office. Support was being sought from donor partners, such as the World Health Organization and the United Nations Population Fund, to assist in efforts to meet the Sustainable Development Goals, in particular the one on women and health. Temporary special measures had been under discussion in Congress for some time. It was difficult, however, to convince male politicians that women's participation was important and would have a significant impact on political and public life. Women's participation would be discussed at the next women's conference.

37. **Ms. Oliver** (Federated States of Micronesia) said that data collection and disaggregation were very important for monitoring progress. Data were available in all four states, and efforts were being made to develop a data streamlining and assessment mechanism at the federal level. The Committee's guidance on templates and systems used by other States parties would be welcome. With regard to education on the provisions of the Convention, her office's very limited budget restricted its activities considerably. Efforts were being made to incorporate women's advancement activities into the next budget cycle, with a view to running a large-scale educational campaign at the national level.

38. **Ms. Acar** said that while customs and traditions ensured that society remained connected to its roots, they could also perpetuate stereotypes and prejudices. Some of them therefore needed to be modified, or in some cases eliminated. The withdrawal of the State party's reservation to article 5 of the Convention was therefore particularly important. Traditions that created, promoted or strengthened discrimination against women through patriarchal stereotypes could be the root cause of gender-based violence against women. She wished to know whether there were any specific, targeted policies in place to bring such customs and traditions into line with international human rights standards. She also asked whether and when the age of consent would be increased from 13 to 18 nationwide. Given the difficulties women faced in reporting gender-based violence, were any awareness-raising campaigns being run to break the silence? She asked when all four states would be expected to have laws in place that addressed physical and sexual violence, and whether the Government was considering adopting a comprehensive federal law on gender-based violence against women.

39. The legal definitions of rape varied between the states, but tended to be based on the use of physical force rather than the absence of consent. Marital rape was not criminalized or even classified as an offence in any of the states; she asked whether the State party intended to rectify that deficiency. With regard to data collection, she wished to know whether the data collected at the state level were disaggregated by gender, type of crime and relationship between the perpetrator and the victim, in line with the Committee's recommendations. Lastly, she sought clarification of the number of shelters for women victims of violence, how they were financed, who ran them and how the staff were trained. She also wished to know whether the professionals who referred women to those shelters were trained in dealing with victims of violence.

40. **Ms. Walter** (Federated States of Micronesia) said that the country's culture and traditions did not promote gender violence. The family health and safety study conducted in 2014 had brought to light significant issues of gender stereotyping. Measures were being taken to educate the public, with cooperation from women's NGOs and with support from other countries. Public demonstrations were held to spread the message of women's rights, and legal services were conducting outreach to remote communities to raise awareness of the availability of free legal services. Thus far, legislation on domestic violence had been passed by Kosrae State, and remained under discussion in the other three states. The definition of marital rape, which differed between the four states, required harmonization. Most shelters for victims of violence were managed by non-governmental or religious organizations. Funding was difficult to obtain. Staff training in counselling and emotional

support was needed; staff in some shelters, in particular those working with children, had encountered difficulties for which they had not been adequately prepared.

41. **Mr. Bacalando** (Federated States of Micronesia) said that the definitions of sexual offences, in particular rape, differed between the four states. In 2012, federal legislation on trafficking in persons had been passed by Congress and was applicable in all four states. Consideration could be given to a similar approach for legislation on domestic and sexual violence. The devolved system of governance, however, required that specific measures should be taken to bring particular issues under the remit of the federal Government.

42. **Ms. Manalo** said that the Committee had great respect for culture and traditions and understood that the Polynesian States had always had a heritage of peace, non-violence and harmony. There were, however, many factors at play that could encourage violence against women in the State party. She wished to know how the Government ensured their protection and planned to minimize, if not eradicate, violence against women.

43. **Ms. Oliver** (Federated States of Micronesia) said that joint efforts were being made with NGOs to run a violence awareness campaign. Until the 2014 study, there had been little awareness of the prevalence of gender-based violence against women. The issue must therefore be recognized and public awareness must be raised. Data on violence were not disaggregated by the criteria recommended by the Committee.

44. **Mr. Bacalando** (Federated States of Micronesia) said that in order to raise the age of consent, discussions needed to be held between the national and state authorities. Those discussions were ongoing; efforts would be required to ensure that the momentum was maintained and that steps would be taken to bring the law into line with the provisions of the Convention.

45. **Ms. Gabr** asked what was being done to prevent trafficking and exploitation of prostitution. She requested information about the measures taken to implement the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and national legislation on the criminalization of exploitation for sex tourism. She wished to know whether any studies had been conducted on the root causes and magnitude of trafficking in persons in the State party and whether law enforcement officers and the judiciary were trained to deal with trafficking cases. She also asked whether the State party had a plan of action on trafficking and said that if so, information on the plan would be appreciated. Was there a plan to establish shelters for victims of trafficking, and were there any mechanisms in place to refer trafficking victims to support and witness protection services? She wondered whether any measures were foreseen to reduce the demand for prostitution. Since the act of engaging in prostitution was not addressed explicitly in law, and the penalties and legal provisions on solicitation differed between the states, she asked whether the federal Government intended to harmonize legislation and what measures it envisaged to prevent the exploitation of women through sex tourism. Were any alternative employment options provided for women who wished to leave prostitution?

46. **Mr. Bacalando** (Federated States of Micronesia) said that since the enactment of the Trafficking in Persons Act, the Federated States of Micronesia had been removed from the Tier 2 watch list for trafficking in persons that was maintained by the Department of State of the United States of America. Several trafficking convictions had been handed down and victims had been rescued. A case had recently been filed against a foreign citizen who had visited the country and had been suspected of involvement in prostitution. Efforts to counter, prevent and eliminate trafficking in persons would continue. Financial challenges impeded witness protection, particularly when witnesses needed to be transported from one state to another while waiting to testify. A more substantial, lasting solution was needed. Training for law enforcement officers was ongoing; they were briefed on anti-trafficking measures and trained to work with victims. Every effort was being made to minimize the number of violations committed by law enforcement officers and to prepare them adequately to handle trafficking cases.

47. **Ms. Gabr** said she hoped that despite limited resources, shelters would be adequately equipped to provide physical, psychological and material support for witnesses.

She asked whether any joint efforts to address trafficking were under way with international partners, such as the United Nations and the International Organization for Migration.

48. **Ms. Manalo** said she had noted that the country's economy was often severely affected by natural disasters, which could destroy livelihoods and render those affected vulnerable to trafficking and exploitation. Women in such circumstances were often taken in by traffickers and forced into prostitution. She asked what was being done to protect women under such circumstances.

49. **Ms. Oliver** (Federated States of Micronesia) said that a copy of the national plan of action on trafficking could be provided to the Committee.

Articles 7 to 9

50. **Ms. Nwankwo** said that although the State party did not place legal restrictions on women's participation in politics and in the work of international organizations, including in high-level positions, there were no women members of Congress in the Federated States of Micronesia. Cultural norms and stereotypes hindered women's participation in politics and perpetuated the idea that women in government should be subservient to their male counterparts. She wished to know what mechanisms were envisaged to enhance women's participation in decision-making bodies and whether any specific steps were being taken to enable women with disabilities to provide input on issues that affected them and to participate in political and public life. She asked whether there were any mechanisms in place to promote the nomination of women as candidates for positions in intergovernmental bodies and whether there were any measures in place to prepare women for recruitment at the international level.

51. **Mr. Bacalando** (Federated States of Micronesia) said that measures to increase women's political participation would require considerable coordination and discussion between the federal and state governments. With regard to awareness-raising, campaigns had been run in villages but more commitment was required, and support from NGOs and international partners would be essential. Although there was no discrimination under the law, inhibition prevented women from participating in politics. The situation was beginning to change, however, and two female candidates would run for Congress in the forthcoming elections. As the country had ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, legislative changes would be made at the national and state levels to ensure conformity with the Convention. The implementation of that Convention would have financial implications. Mechanisms for the representation of persons with disabilities in government and decision-making would be considered in the context of that Convention.

52. **Ms. Nwankwo** said that, as women tended not to stand for election owing to the cultural and historical understanding of their traditional role in society, she wished to know what measures were being taken to empower them to overcome cultural barriers and to prepare them to participate in political processes.

53. **Ms. Chigiyal** (Federated States of Micronesia) said that the Government had partnered with United Nations agencies to train women in the skills required in order to run for office. That issue had also been taken up at the national women's conferences. With regard to the nomination of women candidates for positions in the governing bodies of international organizations, funds for such activities were lacking, and the support of the whole Government was required.

54. **Ms. Gbedemah** said that women's apparent reluctance to enter careers in public office was pervasive. Women faced many social and economic obstacles in that regard, including household responsibilities and psychological barriers, and the fact that political systems had traditionally been inaccessible to women. Thus, even though the law was gender-neutral with regard to political participation, de facto barriers to women's participation remained.

55. **Ms. Song** asked whether measures were being taken to reach the 30-per-cent target for women in decision-making positions. Were those women who had already attained such positions able to mainstream a gender perspective in their work? What was being done to

engage men in gender issues and encourage them to take a gender-sensitive approach to their work and promote women's rights?

56. **Ms. Jahan** said that the Committee had been informed that women in the State party were not encouraged to enter politics and stand for election. She wondered whether the Government had considered measures to require political parties to nominate more female candidates.

57. **Ms. Walter** (Federated States of Micronesia) said that support had been received from UN-Women on how to promote women's political participation, how to campaign and how to assess the best means of exerting political influence with constituencies. Progress was slow, however, and obtaining 30-per-cent representation remained a challenge. Efforts were being made to invite men to participate in the women's conferences and to engage them in promoting women's political participation. Socioeconomic issues made progress difficult to achieve; the demands of politics meant that women, especially those with children, could be precluded from participation owing to their duties as caregivers.

Articles 10 to 14

58. **Ms. Haidar** said that while there was no legal impediment to equal access to education in the State party, and elementary education was provided free of charge, students were unable to attend school in some states owing to a dearth of places or staff. She wished to know how students were selected for deferred entry and whether any measures were being taken to bridge the gap in staffing and school places. Private schools expelled girl students who became pregnant. While expulsion was not practised in public schools, teenage pregnancy and dropout rates were high. She asked what measures were being taken to provide comprehensive sexual and reproductive health education, rather than simply promoting abstinence, and whether any steps were being taken to encourage girls to return to school after giving birth. She wished to know how the needs of children requiring special education were being met and what was being done to encourage families to enrol girl children with disabilities in school and prevent the stigmatization of such children.

59. **Ms. Walter** (Federated States of Micronesia) said that the Department of Education had a programme to allocate funding for the education of persons with disabilities, including through outreach to children who were unable to attend school. While private schools had a tendency to expel pregnant girls, many such schools received government funding, which could be leveraged to prevent expulsions. With regard to sexuality education, programmes were in place to promote abstinence. Secondary education was compulsory, and girls who became pregnant were entitled to return to school after they had given birth.

60. **Mr. Bacalando** (Federated States of Micronesia) said that the Government subsidized private schools, which were therefore required to uphold national policies and priorities, one of which was to prevent discrimination against pregnant girls.

61. **Ms. Haidar** said that the focus on abstinence had not resulted in a reduction in teenage pregnancy. Broader education on sexual and reproductive health was therefore required. The State party was encouraged to address the issue of sexuality education more comprehensively.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.